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AUTHOR   Helms, Cynthia Mae
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ABSTRACT
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importance of the human element in libraries. The current changes in
population demand cultural sensitivity training in all walks of life.
Libraries and librarians have a role to play. They need to cope with the
multicultural environment by understanding the basics of multiculturalism and
applying them in the library setting. Librarians can achieve better
relationships with their patrons and colleagues by gaining more insight into
the differences that exist between cultures and applying them to their work
environment. Cultures differ in many aspects: sense of self and space, time
and time consciousness, communication and language, relationships and
associations, mental processes and learning styles, work habits and
practices, beliefs and attitudes, values and norms, dress and appearance, and
food habits. Each of these areas is discussed, followed by suggestions on how
libraries can approach the issues in regard to library staff and patrons.
Lists are included of what library associations, libraries, and librarians
can do to apply multiculturalism in their organizations. (Contains 49
endnotes.) (Author/AEF)

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DEVELOPING MULTICULTURALISM
IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

By

Cynthia Mae Helms

A paper presented at the
18th Annual Conference of the
Association of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians
Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland
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ABSTRACT

The strong emphasis of technology is slowly diminishing the importance of the human element in libraries. The current changes in population demand cultural sensitivity training in all walks of life. Libraries and librarians have a role to play. They need to cope with the multicultural environment by understanding the basics of multiculturalism and applying them in the library setting. Librarians can achieve better relationships with their patrons and colleagues by gaining more insight into the differences that exist between cultures and applying them to their work environment. Cultures differ in the following aspects: sense of self and space, time and time consciousness, communication and language, relationships and associations, mental processes and learning styles, work habits and practices, beliefs and attitudes, values and norms, dress and appearance, and food habits. Library associations, libraries, and librarians can create a positive impact in a multicultural society.

There has been so much talk about technology and so much emphasis on libraries without walls that people are beginning to think that libraries and librarians are no longer needed. It is about time that we focus on the human aspect of libraries.

Multiculturalism, intercultural communication, diversity, affirmative action, pluralism, equal employment opportunity--all these buzz words of today recognize the state of the world we are in. The population in the United States is changing, the business world is putting a lot of emphasis on intercultural training, librarianship is an international profession, and we as Christians believe that we are all brothers in Christ--children of the Heavenly King. We have all the reasons to focus on multiculturalism in our libraries.

For those of us who come from libraries with multicultural staff and culturally-diverse populations, I ask the question: "How much time have we spent in learning how to deal with multiculturalism in our libraries?"

What is culture? Culture is an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of members of any given society. Culture refers to the total way of life. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, does, says, believes, and makes: its customs, language, material artifacts and shared systems of attitudes, feelings, and ideas. It is learned behavior acquired as a member of society, shared experience, dynamic and constantly changing, integrated behavior, and logical within its own values.[1] A person can be a combination of cultures and may change according to the environment he or she is in.

WHAT ARE THE BASICS OF UNDERSTANDING OTHER CULTURES?

Sense of Self and Space

The standard distance between people conducting business is about an arm's length in American culture. We feel that anything closer than that is "too close for comfort." However, people from the Middle East stand close enough to feel the breath on their face and catch the other person's scent. The Japanese, on the other hand, have a greater distance than the Americans.

While Americans are accustomed to the handshake as the most common form of greeting, people from other cultures will give hugs and kisses--sometimes more than once.[2]

Library Application: *When patrons come to the service desk with a distance quite uncomfortable to you, do something to establish the distance. When working with people from other cultures, take some effort in evaluating what is comfortable space for each other. Be more understanding when people greet you with a bow, or hand things to you with two hands, or give you a great big hug in appreciation for what you have done for them.*

Time and Time Consciousness

In the United States, time is money. The Hispanics have "mañana" which is not necessarily tomorrow but sometime in the future and the Arabs have "Inshallah" which means whenever it comes to

pass. For other cultures, time is elastic and relative. Time is not just for completing tasks but for developing relationships and enjoying oneself. Americans are deemed as always being in a hurry.[3]

Some cultures are monochronic--doing only one thing at one time and with clear schedules. Other cultures are polychronic--doing different things at the same time.[4]

Library application: *When books are checked out by patrons, take time to explain the importance of returning things on time and the consequence of being overdue. When calling for meetings, emphasize the need to start on time. Supervisors have to help staff members tune in to the host country's concept of time.*

Be more sensitive to the fact that while some staff members can do multiple jobs at the same time, there are others who can only do one job at a time. There may be staff members who come from cultures who feel that socializing is more important than doing the task on hand. Once again, give them more training on time consciousness.

Communication and Language

Non-verbal communication can be noted in facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, smiling, nodding, and touching. Americans interpret direct eye contact as honesty and assertiveness while Asians consider it as disrespect. A smile can mean friendliness to Americans but can mean embarrassment, discomfort, and confusion to Asians. A nod does not always mean "yes," because a nod in other cultures mean "no".[5] "The American 'thumbs up' or 'O.K.' sign may be a terrible insult to the Brazilians, Greeks, or Turks. In other cultures, people may point with their middle finger which is close to an obscene gesture

for Americans."[6]

Verbal communication is expressed by tone of voice, intonation patterns, and emotional intensity. Note the evidences of turn taking, relationship of reason and emotion, silence, and vocalics. Americans are known to be direct, brash, harsh, loud, and noisy. Their emphasis is on content while other cultures emphasize context.[7] When it comes to expressions of grief, people from other cultures express their grief and sorrow loudly at funerals.

For some cultures, the message is to engage the person and to establish and confirm relationships; other cultures consider the message to show ideas, and/or opinions. In the former, the message is an art while in the latter, the message is literal.[8] Americans display explicit, direct communication; other cultures display implicit, indirect communication.[9]

Because of differences in language, non-Americans can be distinguished by their pronunciation, direct translation, and usage of words. The Japanese, for example, seem to interchange l and r.[10] The fact is that they do not interchange those two sounds; rather, they have a sound that is between l and r. Usage of words is another aspect of language as shown by the following examples of British vs. American English: guillotine for paper cutter, lift for elevator, and torch for flashlight.

Some topics are acceptable in some cultures and not acceptable in other cultures. We laugh about remarks made about Reagan or Bush, but international students do not tend to have the same appreciation for commentary made at the expense of political or religious leaders from their countries.[11]

Library application: *Listen carefully without interrupting. Be more patient. Speak slowly and avoid being judgmental about other people's intelligence or abilities.[12] Stay simple and slow-paced. Avoid jargon, slang, unusual idioms, and colloquialisms. Check back for understanding. Learn at*

least the basics of the other language.[13]

Patrons who spend a long time explaining why a book is late or is lost is not necessarily beating around the bush. They may come from cultures where such lengthy explanation is part of the culture's art of delivering a message.

Relationships and Associations

Americans have nuclear families while other cultures have extended families. When Americans hire relatives they are accused of nepotism. This is not so in other cultures where hiring of relatives is expected and considered respect and loyalty to the family.[14]

The United States is in a capitalistic environment where the drive is to compete. Other cultures emphasize cooperation and collaboration rather than competition.[15] This concept of working cooperatively together is conveyed by the word "harambee" in Swahili; and "bayanihan" and "pakikisama" in Tagalog.

The concept of loyalty is viewed differently according to culture. Americans are loyal to abstract principles. People from other cultures tend to be loyal to individuals even to the extent of covering up a friend or a relative's infarction. They would also prefer to give allegiance to their boss than to the organization.[16]

While we all want to be treated with respect and dignity, we display these in different ways. Saving face is important in many cultures. In Asia, the Middle East, and some of Latin America, one's face has to be preserved at all cost. There are those who would even prefer death to loss of face. Criticism of performance can be considered personal insult. Changing titles for the benefit of the organization is not

always taken lightly by people from other cultures who may consider their new title belittling and a loss of face in the light of people from their country.[17]

Individualism is displayed by cultures that emphasize individual decision making, autonomy, initiative, achievement, economic mobility, constant change, and dynamic progress. Collectivism on the other hand is displayed by other cultures that emphasize group decisions, emotional dependence on the group, blending of personal interests with others' interests, less economic dependence, and conservatism.[18]

Library application: *In dealing with library staff, administrators must attempt to provide a balance between competition and cooperation; individualism and collectivism. Utilize these concepts of working together in developing teams. Develop a sensitivity for people to whom "face saving" is important when giving constructive criticism and in implementing structural changes.*

Learn how to deal better with patrons who like to cover up their friend's or relative's mistake when they come from a culture that practices this as a sign of brotherhood rather than a form of connivance. Help them understand how each person is responsible for his own actions.

Mental Processes and Learning Styles

Americans emphasize experiential activities and role playing; they expect learners to draw their own conclusions. Other cultures are more didactic and formal. Learning is a process of transmission from teacher to student. People from these cultures also depend largely on written information.[19]

When international students come to the United States, they have to adjust to self-service and numbering categories.[20] In a library setting, they have to cope with classification systems and open

stacks.[21] Another thing that international students have to cope with is the concept of plagiarism.[22]

The level of technology from which the students come from is a significant factor in their learning experience. While many of the students in the United States have the opportunity to have computers in their homes and in their schools, some international students come with handicap in keyboarding as well as in other technologies such as running photocopiers and microfiche reader/printers. Even the art of using a public phone should not be assumed when dealing with students who come from other countries. And though some students may have these skills, the terminologies used may be different.

<u>Library application</u>: *Library instructors should learn to speak slowly and use simple illustrations. They should exercise patience in showing the use of online catalogs and databases. Time must be spent in emphasizing the importance of careful citing and in explaining the meaning of plagiarism. Library staff should show rather than just tell or point, taking time to demonstrate the use of machines without embarrassing the patrons in front of others.*

Work Habits and Practices

Problem solving and crisis orientation for Americans are approached with a "fix-it" attitude. Planning is emphasized, problems are obstacles to be overcome, and in order to succeed action must take place. Other cultures have a non-crisis orientation which means that they downplay the possibility of crisis. They focus on actual experience and delay decision-making. Their philosophy is to adjust to the situation because these experiences may be a result of fate or luck.[23]

Americans have a Protestant work ethic: "The devil makes work for idle hands." Work is more

than a means of survival; it is a divine calling. The emphasis is on job satisfaction. Career brings joy, esteem, and achievement. For other cultures, work is a necessary evil. Status is closely tied up with work. While there are some cultures who consider it beyond their dignity to work with their hands, there are other cultures who find this quite acceptable.[24]

Reward structures must also be noted. What may be considered reward in one culture may be insult or punishment in another culture. While one culture would appreciate receiving promotion, other cultures would rather have more free time with the family as a reward.[25]

Independent judgment and decision making are not universally accepted norms. In most other cultures, workers wait for their leaders to give directions and make decisions. People coming from such cultures should not be misjudged as being unmotivated or lazy.[26]

Library application: *In evaluating employees, supervisors must recognize the different ways people view work. Supervisors must also consider the way workers are motivated for advancement and improvement. In planning for awards, supervisors may consider surveying their employees' choice of rewards, bonuses, etc. Bear in mind that the way people work with each other in committees and other group activities may reflect their cultural backgrounds. Utilize the strengths that people from other cultures bring to the work place.*

Beliefs and Attitudes

Religion is probably the first thing that needs to be addressed when it comes to beliefs and attitudes.

People from different cultures consider holy days and holidays in different ways. There are people in our midst who do not necessarily hold our beliefs. And even if a group of people comes from the same religion, they may still have different ways of interpreting the doctrines in the light of their various cultures. While gluten is highly used in some cultures, a Hindu student assistant said that in his homeland lentils and other legumes were commonly used to support a vegetarian life style.

Holidays are another thing. I remember working in an African county and having classes on Dec. 25. What may be a special holiday to one culture may mean nothing to another culture. And so while Martin Luther King is a holiday for some institutions in the United States, it may have no significance elsewhere.

Gender roles are important in understanding people from other cultures. In some groups, it is acceptable for women to work outside the home. In other groups, women can work outside the home but they cannot hold positions of authority over men. In this case, it is hard for a man to take orders from a woman. There is a need to educate employees about the legal risks of discriminating because of gender.[27]

Social order and authority play an important role in peoples' attitudes. Differences in rank and respect for hierarchical levels are important in many Asian, European, and Latin-American countries. Students do not question teachers, employees do not confront their bosses, and children do not talk back to parents in other cultures. People coming from other cultures will not take orders from a fellow countryman who is younger or who belongs to a lower social rank. Since the American culture is more egalitarian, it is not concerned about traditional and hierarchal attitudes about authority.[28]

Library application: *There may be situations where male patrons or male student assistants would rather listen to a male librarian rather than to a female librarian. Patrons who come from*

cultures that regard typing as a low class job will refuse to type or use the keyboard to find their materials. One summer one business student from an Asian county came to the library workshop and refused to touch the keyboard because he said he always had a secretary to do his typing for him. When confronted with this situation, find ways by which the patron can see the value of performing his or her own search on the public computers.

Be sensitive and courteous but firm with people who feel that they carry with them their tribal ranks and powers wherever they go. Treat everyone fairly and apply the rules across the board. Back yourself up with printed policies and regulations.

Values and Norms

While Americans support the concept of individual freedom, people from other cultures would rather give up their individual freedom to conform to the family, group, or the larger society. Cultural differences are also found in the way people respond to public praise, open desire for advancement and promotion, and whistle-blowing.[29]

Privacy is one important aspect in people's values and norms. While it is common for Americans to openly discuss personal matters, it may be embarrassing for people from other cultures to hear such stories. The opposite is true when it comes to privacy regarding physical space. Privacy with regards to space is important to Americans while people coming from other cultures are not so conscious of protecting their space because they are used to sharing their bedroom with other members of the family. It is not common to see an American find a seat next to an empty seat but not in other cultures where passengers

would rather sit next to someone in a public vehicle.[30]

Respect is shown by the way one addresses a person, where one stands, how one greets a person, when one speaks, etc.[31] While Americans tend to call each other by the first name, other cultures find it disrespectful to call elderly people or people in authority by their first names. In these cultures, respect is shown by calling people by their titles or simply by the correct form of Miss, Mrs., or Mr. A person in authority is called either Sir or Madam or by their profession such as Doctor, Professor, or Engineer. Other cultures have special words or use the third person to indicate respect.

Library application: *Be conscious of what employees and patrons consider as private matter. What may be common place situations in North America, may be very embarrassing to other cultures. Offer private tutoring or consultation sessions to people who are uncomfortable being taught how to use online databases in the public especially if they have held high public positions in the countries where they come from.*

When uncertain as to how a person wants to be addressed, lean towards formality and use correct titles such as Mr., Mrs., Prof., Dr., Sir, or Madam. People who prefer other ways of being addressed normally indicate how they want to be called.

Just because patrons cannot express themselves correctly does not mean that they do not understand what they are reading or what is being said. Exercise patience and courtesy at all times.

Dress and Appearance

Each culture has a different way of deciding what is appropriate clothing. One aspect of dressing has to do with what is covered and what is exposed. While a white lady cannot stand an Indian lady's exposed midriff, an Indian lady cannot stand a white lady's exposed legs. Another aspect is the degree of formality and informality. It has been said that Americans can easily be detected by their casual, informal clothes. Europeans tend to be more formally dressed than Americans.

The "hair is a symbol of virility for men, femininity for women, and individual dignity for all."[32] Orthodox Jews wear their forelocks, Afghanistan women cover their heads and faces, Hawaiians put bright colored flowers on their hair, etc.

A difficult topic to address is body odor. Americans seem to have a deodorant for almost every part of the body. They normally react negatively to the smell of another person, but in other cultures this is important. In the Middle East, marriage-go-betweens often ask to smell the girl before they recommend her as a prospective bride.[33]

Library application: *Remember that body scent is not necessarily a sign of uncleanliness. Each library or institution should consider having a dress code and making this information readily known upon hiring and during the orientation process. Make certain that such dress codes are easy to conform to. People coming from cultures where wearing uniforms is a norm will find it easy to abide by such dress codes. When screening job applicants, be more cautious about making judgments based on appearance and clothing especially if the person is from another culture.*

Food and Eating Habits

Part of living and working in a multicultural environment is understanding other cultures' food and eating habits. People may eat with chopsticks or with their fingers, use their left hand for the fork and the right hand for the knife, or drink from a communal bowl.[34]

When employees come for potluck dinners, they may bring their ethnic food for your enjoyment. Some like their food hot, some like it mild. Some smack their lips and others slurp their soup. Some people put both hands on the table, others prominently use their right hand only and keep their left hand on their lap unless needed for cutting food. Some foods considered exotic and special in one culture may have a very offensive smell to other cultures--just think of the durian fruit.

Belching is considered impolite in American culture but it is considered a compliment to the cook in Asian culture.[35] The hostess in African culture does not eat with the guests; rather, she goes around serving and filling the guests' plates as much as she can. In a formal American meal, the hostess eats with the guests and serves herself first before passing the food on to the guests. In some cultures, a guest shows that he or she has had enough food by leaving a small portion on the plate.

Library application: *Be considerate of other cultures in library parties, when inviting employees to your homes, or when your employees invite you to their homes. Be aware of these differences when cooking is allowed in the staff lounge. Set up rules in the staff lounge. Determine what types of food can be cooked or what items may placed in the refrigerator. Set up cleaning procedures and expect these rules to carried through. Library employees in public service will occasionally encounter patrons with garlic breath or "kimchi" breath.*

WHAT CAN THE ASSOCIATION DO?

1. Continue helping the overseas libraries meet their needs.

2. Implement an "Adopt an Overseas Library" program.

3. Consider the needs of overseas librarians when planning conferences and recognize that their needs are different from those in North America.

4. Get more international librarians involved in the association.

5. Hold regular meetings outside the U.S.

6. Set up programs for visiting librarians.

7. Develop an "Exchange Librarians" program.

8. Introduce a mentoring program whereby a North American librarian pairs up with an overseas librarian.

WHAT CAN LIBRARIES DO?

1. Hire and maintain a culturally sensitive staff.

2. Include diversity and multiculturalism in the library's mission statement.

4. Develop a strong staff development program with an ongoing sensitivity program.[36]

5. Connect with different parts of the campus and the community that deal with different cultures: English Language Institute, Institute of World Missions, Department of Missiology in the Seminary, Center for Intercultural Relations, etc.

6. Collect multicultural and multilingual materials.[37]

7. Form a "Cultural Awareness Committee" responsible for preparing displays and programs that celebrate international holidays and recognize the different cultural groups on campus.[38]

8. Run culturally sensitive library instruction programs. Apply some of these suggestions: Listen intently. Speak deliberately and clearly. Exercise patience. Change linguistic style.[39] Use hands-outs, transparencies, or chalk board rather than plain dictation. Spend more time going through procedures rather than just explaining the concept.

9. Encourage service desk personnel to be cognizant of different cultures and focus on human interaction as part of the reference process.[40]

WHAT CAN WE DO AS LIBRARIANS?

1. Develop a tolerance of other cultures.

2. Become adept at cultural appraisal and empathy.[41]

3. Take classes in foreign language and culture.[42]

4. Increase global awareness by reading, volunteering to serve in other countries, and by reading widely about issues that affect the world.[43]

5. Go on educational tours to gain better understanding of others.

6. Avoid stereotypes and generalizations.[44]

7. Appreciate wide range of cognitive style differences.[45]

8. Strive to make multicultural students feel comfortable on campus and within the library.[46]

9. Retain appreciation of gender and racial points of view.[47]

10. Show that perfect English is not necessarily expected.[48]

11. Encourage understanding of overall importance of cultural diversity in an academic setting.[49]

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